04/24/24 BIG FOOD

Bird Flu Virus Fragments Detected in Retail Milk in U.S. + More

The Defender's Big Food NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to industrial food companies and their products, including ultra-processed foods, food additives, contaminants, GMOs and lab-grown meat and their toxic effects on human health. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff

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Bird Flu Virus Fragments Detected in Retail Milk in U.S.

Politico reported:

> Bird flu virus fragments have been detected in retail milk samples across the U.S., industry groups told lawmakers on Capitol Hill, according to three people familiar with the matter.
>
> The FDA on Tuesday confirmed "some of the samples collected have indicated the presence" of bird flu "particles" under certain testing, but the agency maintained that "pasteurization is likely to inactivate the virus." The FDA said it will make additional test results available in the coming days.
>
> The National Milk Producers Federation said in a statement that "viral fragments detected after pasteurization are nothing more than evidence

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that the virus is dead; they have zero impact on human health."

Rick Bright, who led the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority and raised alarm about the Trump administration's early response to the COVID-19 pandemic, said he wants to see the results of the studies conducted. "That's the data I'd like to know before I drink milk," Bright said.

As of Tuesday, bird flu has been detected in 33 dairy herds across eight states, according to the latest USDA data.

EU Parliament Vote on New GMOs: Blow to Food and Environmental Safety

GMWatch reported:

In its final plenary session, the EU Parliament endorsed the EU Commission's proposal to widely deregulate the new generation of GMOs — products of so-called "new genomic techniques", or NGT.

Friends of the Earth Europe commented: "This decision positions the EU for even greater deregulation than in the United States of America. The approved legislative proposal grants corporations the right to market new GMOs without any type of safety, monitoring and liability obligations, putting human health, nature, and farmers' rights at risk."

Mute Schimpf, food and farming campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe said: "Today's decision is a blow to food and environmental safety. It endorses a path that leaves nature, the food sector, and farmers vulnerable while bolstering profits and unchecked power for big corporations."

Friends of the Earth Europe added, "Concretely, it means that agrochemical giants like Bayer, Corteva and BASF could minimize the costs associated with bringing new GM products to market but increase their profits from untested seed sales and patent fees, even if their use leads to environmental contamination or threatens farmers' income by contaminating harvests, all without accountability for potential harm."

Survey Finds That 60 Firms Are Responsible for Half of World's Plastic Pollution

The Guardian reported:

Fewer than 60 multinationals are responsible for more than half of the world's plastic pollution, with five responsible for a quarter of that, based on the findings of a piece of research published on Wednesday.

The researchers concluded that for every percentage increase in plastic produced, there was an equivalent increase in plastic pollution in the environment. An international team of volunteers collected and surveyed more than 1,870,000 items of plastic waste across 84 countries over five years: the bulk of the rubbish collected was single-use packaging for food, beverage, and tobacco products.

Altria and Philip Morris International made up 2% of the branded plastic litter found, Danone and Nestlé produced 3% of it, PepsiCo was responsible for 5% of the discarded packaging, and 11% of branded plastic waste could be traced to the Coca-Cola company.

Plant-Based Meat Boomed. Here Comes the Bust

WIRED reported:

Over the past three years, the plant-based meat industry has experienced a

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major reversal in vibes. Sales boomed in the early months of the pandemic, as slaughterhouse shutdowns disrupted conventional meat supply chains and shoppers started trying out meatless burgers, sausages, and seafood instead. Between 2018 and 2021, total sales of plant-based foods in the U.S. grew from $4.8 billion to $7.4 billion, with much of that growth driven by plant-based meat in particular.

But a new report on sales of vegan meat, dairy, and seafood suggests that enthusiasm for plant-based products might be slowing down. An annual report from the Good Food Institute, an alternative protein nonprofit, found that dollar sales of plant-based meat and seafood in the U.S. fell by 13% over the past two years. As prices of meat alternatives have gone up, this masks a much greater drop in unit sales over the same time period — they fell by 26% between 2021 and 2023.

Rising concerns about so-called ultra-processed food have also buffeted the plant-based meat industry, given the high amount of processing usually needed to make its products. In response, Beyond's new burgers have less salt and saturated fat than the previous generation, as well as a "simplified ingredient list," while many other plant-based companies are emphasizing their "clean-label" credentials.

Gerber, Perrigo Sued Over 'Store-Brand' Infant Formula Prices

Reuters reported:

> Infant formula makers Gerber and Perrigo have been hit with a proposed class-action lawsuit accusing them of scheming to artificially drive up prices for "store-brand" formula sold at Walmart, Walgreens and other retailers.
>
> The lawsuit, filed Monday in Alexandria, Virginia, federal court, said Perrigo violated antitrust law by illegally agreeing with Gerber to block competitors from cutting into the market for store-brand formula.
>
> Perrigo is the country's top supplier of store-brand formula, which is sold under retailers' labels and can cost less than similar branded products. Gerber, according to the lawsuit, agreed to give Perrigo "first right of refusal" to Gerber's excess formula supply, which a competitor otherwise might have used to sell to retailers.

House Gives Initial OK to Bill Protecting Pesticide-Makers

Columbia Missourian reported:

> Representatives gave initial approval Wednesday to a bill that could protect pesticide manufacturers from some cancer lawsuits. The debate on the House floor wasn't split along party lines, however, as several Republicans cautioned against the risk of cancers caused by pesticides.
>
> HB 2763, sponsored by Rep. Dane Diehl, R-Butler, would protect pesticide manufacturers from claims that they failed to warn consumers of possible cancer risks in their products as long as the federal Environmental Protection Agency has approved those products.
>
> Much of the debate focused on a specific pesticide manufacturer: Bayer, the company with U.S. headquarters in St. Louis that purchased Monsanto, the original manufacturer of RoundUp pesticide.
>
> Debate on the floor also took a somber tone, as representatives from both parties spoke about the toll of seeing their family members fight cancer or fighting it themselves. Rep. Chantelle Nickson-Clark, D-St. Louis pointed out what she termed the hypocrisy of her colleagues for pursuing this legislation after wishing her good health during her own fight with cancer.

The bill was approved on a voice vote and needs one more vote before it can go to the Senate for consideration.

Fresh and Frozen Imported Strawberries Highly Contaminated With Pesticides, Report Says

CNN Health reported:

> Some fresh, frozen and canned nonorganic fruits and vegetables are contaminated with concerning levels of pesticides, according to an investigation by Consumer Reports, a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization that provides product reviews and ratings for its subscribers.
>
> Some of the highest levels of pesticides were found in produce imported into the United States, according to the report released Thursday. Sixty-five of 100 samples of the most contaminated produce were imported, with 52 of those samples originating from Mexico.
>
> The majority of the highly contaminated imports were strawberries, typically the frozen variety, the report said. Because they grow low to the ground and are therefore more accessible to bugs, strawberries often top lists of foods contaminated with insecticides.
>
> Imported and domestic green beans also tested high for pesticides, even samples that were labeled organic, "the only organic food we found with significant levels of pesticides," said James Rogers, director of food safety research and testing at Consumer Reports.
>
> Nearly all the tested green beans were contaminated with acephate, an organophosphate insecticide that is considered a "possible human carcinogen." The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency prohibited the chemical for use on green beans in 2011.

Does Washing Produce Really Remove Pesticides?

Gizmodo reported:

> A recent analysis from the advocacy organization Consumer Reports is the latest to highlight the potential threat of pesticides in our produce. It suggests that around 20% of commonly sold fruits and vegetables in the U.S. could contain unsafe levels of pesticides. Given that concerning news, you might be wondering how to lessen your risk of exposure. Rinsing produce under the tap is a common practice, but does it actually remove significant amounts of pesticide residue? Here's what the research suggests.
>
> The effects of washing produce have been empirically studied. State officials at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station published a study in 2000 that compared pesticide levels in store-bought produce before and after being rinsed with running water. They found that water noticeably decreased the residue remaining from nine out of the 12 pesticides that they measured.
>
> In subsequent research, they also tested what happened to batches of produce under several different scenarios: leaving it unwashed, washing it with running water for a minute, washing it with a mix of water and soap, and washing it with four specially marketed produce wash products. They found that only the unrinsed produce showed noticeably higher levels of pesticide residue, meaning that running water alone was enough to remove pesticides.
>
> Some pesticides are known carcinogens, and others are endocrine disruptors, which can mimic hormones important to our development. Some studies have suggested that low-dose, chronic exposure to pesticides in our food could possibly contribute to a higher risk of diseases like heart disease, cancer, or type 2 diabetes, though more, better quality research would be needed to know for sure. Pesticides are known to be a clear poisoning risk for people like farm workers who spend the most time around them.

Illinois May Ban Additives in Many Ultra-Processed Foods

Our QC News reported:

> The Illinois Senate recently passed Senate Bill 2637, aimed at banning certain additives and chemicals in food products. The bill, which Senator Willie Preston introduced, targets additives such as titanium dioxide, brominated vegetable oil, potassium bromate, propylparaben, and red dye No. 3 that are present in commonplace items like candies, sodas, and snack foods.
>
> Consumer advocacy groups highlight the presence of these chemicals in popular products like Mountain Dew, packaged breads, and some candies like Skittles. The bill also proposes further studies on the health impacts of other common additives such as BHA and BHT.
>
> The legislation mandates that food manufacturers and distributors phase out these chemicals and find safer alternatives by January 1, 2028. It sets penalties for non-compliance and has sparked significant opposition from the Illinois Manufacturers Association and the National Confectioners Association. These groups argue that such state-level regulations contradict federal oversight by the FDA, leading to inconsistent standards that could confuse consumers and increase food costs.
>
> Similar legislation was recently enacted in California. There are also laws banning many of these additives in Europe. The bill now moves to the Illinois House for further consideration.

Philippines: Farmers and Citizens Win Court Case Against GM Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant

GMWatch reported:

> There's welcome news from the Philippines relating to the court case on GM golden rice and Bt brinjal (eggplant). The Court of Appeal ruled in favor of the applicants — farmer/scientist group MASIPAG and others — and against the Philippine Government's actions that granted permits for the commercial propagation of Bt brinjal and golden rice.
>
> The respondents (the Philippines Government) can appeal against this decision, but it is a significant victory for farmers, the environment, and people's health. The judges' decision to uphold the precautionary principle and to insist on proper risk assessment procedures to be in place and to be carried out gives a clear signal against any deregulation measures.
>
> A press release from MASIPAG says: "This decision underscores the triumph of farmers and the people in asserting their constitutional right to health and a healthy and balanced ecology against the introduction of unwanted, unnecessary genetically modified crops."
>
> GMWatch has repeatedly drawn attention to the lack of proper tests showing that GM golden rice and Bt eggplants are safe to eat.

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